3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23



the hottest month of the year. June to September constitutes the rainy season, and from October to December the larger part of the country is flooded with water, but the marshes and smaller Khors [1] all dry up by April. From November to April the climate is not unhealthy for Europeans. During the wet season mosquitoes are numerous. Malaria and black water fever are the diseases most dangerous to white people.

SOIL

The country is a plain with only inconsiderable elevations, on which the villages of the natives are built. The soil is black and fertile near the river and the khors, back from the water courses it is in most places poorer, sometimes sandy.

VEGETATION

The chief vegetation is high grass, interspersed with shrubs. A light forest of acacia trees is found mainly along the Nile. The acacia is the chief representative of the tree-flora: heglig (Balanites aegyptiaca), sont-acacia (Acacia arabica), Talh (Acacia Seyal), different kinds of gum-acacias, etc. A characteristic feature of the landscape are groups of deleib- and dom-palms (Borassus flabellifer and Hyphaena Thebaica); a beautiful tree is the mahogany tree (Khaya senegalensis); it is most useful as timber, but seems to be rather rare in the Shilluk country; other notable trees are: different kinds of Ficus (Sycomore fig), the ardeib tree (Tamarindus indicus), nabag (a fruit tree) etc. The vegetation on the river is most luxuriant. Though this is not the region of the sudd, yet the river is at most times largely covered with single plants and swimming islands, formed of papyrus, ambach (Herminiera Elaphroxylon), several kinds of reeds, lotus, Umm Suf (Vossia procera), Potamogeton, Ottelia, and many others. The floating vegetation often serves birds for a fishing place. Trees are much hampered in their growth by the fires which the natives light while the grass is dry; the reason for burning the grass is to hunt up game, and to get the ground cleared for cultivation.

ANIMALS

The country being thickly populated, game is not very numerous. But at some distance from the settlements large animals are still frequent, chiefly near the river towards Lake No; the neighbourhood of Kaka and north of it are also rich in game. Elephants, giraffes, buffaloes are met with, though not very frequently; antelopes and gazelles abound: bushbuck (Tragelaphus scriptus), reedbuck (Cervicapra bohor), white-eared cob (Cobus leucotis), ariel (Gazella soemmeringi), dorcas (G. dorcas), isabelline gazelle (G. isabella), oryx, waterbuck (Cobus defassa), Mrs. Gray's waterbuck (Cobus maria), gazella rufifrons, roan antelope (Hippotragus equinus bakeri), hartebeest (Bubalis jacksoni), tiang or Bastard Hartebeest (Damaliscus tiang), Oribi antelope (Ourebia) etc. Of the carnivorous family the most notable are: lion, leopard, jackal, hyena, fox, Zorilla (a little black-and-white animal resembling the American skunk),

[1] Khor (Arab) = water course drying up in the rainless season.

24: Howell E-5 (1951-1952) 1953 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23



by the *ororo* and *kwareth* of Fashoda, a ceremony which I did not attend, though I had seen it done at the installation of *reth* Anei.

If there are any observations to be made on this day's events, they are that the whole occasion was carried out in a much less serious manner than previously. The participants appeared to be light-hearted and the dangers to the *reth*, though carefully stressed, were obviously not taken so seriously. If there is any explanation of this, it is probably that the Shilluk, who have undergone the very real strain of no less than three installations in the last seven years, are now used to these events and do not regard them with such awe as before. It is also possible that Kur, as the son of a successful and popular father, was a candidate accepted with a greater degree of unanimity and calm than either of his two immediate predecessors. The number of participants seemed much less than before, possibly for the reasons already given, and because many people from the south were barred from coming owing to cerebro-spinal meningitis. One had the impression that the number of Nyikang's followers was much greater than those of the *reth*, no doubt partially due to the latter's unexpected decision to stay only one night in Debalo and the fact that this affected his own followers rather than those of Nyikang who had marched through the northern Shilluk. Also, perhaps, because Kur, as son of Fafiti, is popular in the north while he may be less so in the south.

I was not able to attend the final ceremonies. In the account by Mr. Udal which follows, it will be seen that *reth* Kur spent only one night up in the mound of *Athurwic*, with the result that the ceremonies of installation from the point where he fled to Debalo had taken only five days instead of the customary nine.

## THE FINAL CEREMONIES

### (By J. O. Udal)

*The Battle for Nyakwer*

The *reth* was anxious to avoid any further delays and decided to spend only one night in *Athurwic*. The battle for *Nyakwer* thus took place on the third day of the installation ceremonies, not on the fourth as is usual. I arrived at about 8 a.m. on the morning of the third day and was able to exchange greetings with the *reth* from a distance although he could not leave *Athurwic; jago* Yorleiker *wad* Ajang thought that the battle would begin very soon, but the inevitable delays followed and it was not until about 9.15 a.m. that Nyikang's drum was heard being beaten in his shrine. The *kwa* Nyikwom began to assemble outside the shrine from which Nyikang and Dak soon emerged and with them *Nyakwer*, dressed in a Mrs. Gray antelope skin. *Nyakwer* is the central figure of the second battle. In the morning, the *reth*, remembering *Nyakwer*, whom he had forsaken for a girl of the *ororo*, sent for her. The news was brought that Nyikang had abducted her and an ultimatum was forthwith sent by the *reth* to Nyikang demanding her immediate return. Both sides then prepared for battle.

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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797 123 would proceed somewhat in this fashion. I would plan an itinerary to take in half-a-dozen villages covering an area of two square miles or so, and from the mission books or my own notes decide on what had to be done. Augustine, living in Detwok, for example, had not sent in his pagan wife for instruction as he had promised; another gentle prodding would be necessary there. In Debalo I might find Julian, and it would be as well to investigate the report that he had begun negotiations for marriage with a pagan girl; I must find out how far matters have gone and how many head of cattle have been paid, and warn him to send the girl into the mission in good time so that she might be instructed and baptized and the marriage celebrated in church. Thomas in Pabiu has inherited his brother's wife, so I had better look him up and find out what he intends to do about it. And while I am there I shall make a point of calling to see old Rachael, a good woman who has been ill for a long time now; she has already received the last Sacraments and is waiting for our Lord to call her from this weary world, weary [164] indeed for her for she is a leper and blind as well; a few cheerful words and the gift of a screw of tobacco will help to relieve the tedium of a long day. In Othicogo there is another sick woman whom I ought to visit; the Sisters have been taking care of her and instructing her, as she is a pagan; perhaps it might be prudent now to baptize her. Also there is that young villain Paul who ran away from school last week; his father must be persuaded to send him back again. And that reminds me that in the next village lives Frederick, who assured the Superior that he would send his children to school, but has not done so; he must be given a sharp reminder of the duties of Christian parents towards their children. My list of calls thus planned, I pack my sick-[249 276] call case into the cycle bag, break off a few pieces of native grown tobacco from a lump like a brick, and just as hard and appetizing looking, and stuff them into my pocket, mount my cycle and bump off across country towards the main road and the line of villages.

My entrance to the first village is greeted by a cacophony

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Another well-remembered figure is that of Mother Adalgesa who died in 1946 while still in the prime of life. She had been Mother Provincial in this mission for eight years after serving in Uganda for twelve. Her death was brought about by the long hours she spent in the sun treating those who sent for her aid during the epidemic of relapsing fever. She saved many lives and drew many souls to God by her self-sacrificing charity. She died in hospital in Malakal, thanking God that she was able to die in the mission and not in far-off Khartoum. 'It is only right,' she said, 'that I should die here among the Shilluk, since I have given my life for them.' When her body was brought to Lul for burial, the church was crowded with weeping people.

In 1929 the present convent was built, and later the Fathers' house was rebuilt and a school with five classrooms erected.

Other stations than Lul were gradually established as the work among the Shilluk was extended. In 1904 a mission was opened at Tonga, the site originally given by the king. Father Beduschi was the first Superior, but success was very slow, and after ten years or so he went to work in Uganda. It was not until 1923 that a third mission was established, this time near the village of Detwok, from which it takes its name. The funds for its foundation came from a group of Milanese Catholics who wished to assist a mission in Central Africa, preferably among the Shilluk people. Father Beduschi was recalled to become the first Superior of the new foundation; he was well fitted for it, being well acquainted with the language and customs of the people, but having seen the difference between the people in Uganda and the Shilluk he returned to the scene of his former labours very unwillingly and with great misgivings. On his very last day in Tonga a spear had been thrown at him in an attempt on his life. He went with Father Brambilla and a laybrother, Brother Joshua, who had helped him in the foundation of Tonga and had been there since 1904; their first task was to build huts to serve as house, church and school. The same hostility on the part of the natives met them as it had in Lul and Tonga, and

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Father Beduschi wrote that the site of the new mission was unhealthy, and that it had no resources, unless clouds of mosquitoes and flies and armies of white ants could be called resources. As soon as the rains had ended, the new arrivals dug two wells for water, to the amazement of the natives, who could not understand the need for a well when the river was only half a mile away, and who refused to drink the water from the wells, thinking it was bewitched. Father Beduschi managed to gather a few boys together and start a school, but his work was undone by the chiefs, witch doctors, and old people who came and took the children away by force. In other ways, too, ill-luck dogged the new foundation: the few crops they had succeeded in planting in the poor soil failed; the road they had made from the mission to the river was nearly all carried away by floods; a bridge they had built was burned; a great pile of grass gathered for roofing the huts was destroyed by fire.

Father Beduschi had hoped to obtain catechists from Uganda, but when this was found impossible he borrowed some from Lul and sent them into the surrounding villages. He wrote also to the Mother General of the Verona Missionary Sisters asking her to send some Sisters to work in the mission as a present for the Silver Jubilee of his ordination and his coming to Africa. 'Detwok,' he wrote, 'is made up of thorns and crosses; I cannot promise the good Sisters anything but work and trouble; I even promise them disappointments and not consolations, but I do promise them a missionary life, and what more do they desire?' He did not live to see the Sisters arrive, for on November 10th, 1924, he died of blackwater fever, offering his life for the salvation of the Shilluk people. When he was dying, his companion, Father Brambilla, offered up to two shillings for a bottle of milk to give him, but the neighbouring villagers refused to let him have it.

Brother Joshua who was with him both at Tonga and again at the Detwok mission died eventually as a leper. In Tonga he had made friends with a leper in an effort to

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convert him. In Detwok he acted as cook, and one day the native boy who helped him came to Father Beduschi and said that Brother must have leprosy because he picked up very hot things without feeling anything. It was true, and the Brother lived the rest of his saintly life in a leper colony, which he called his parish.

In 1925 the Sisters arrived from Lul to take possession of the huts which had been built for them. Matters progressed slowly, but the years 1931 and 1932 seemed to see an awakening of interest among the Shilluk in matters of religion. This did not last, but the missionaries found it necessary to build a new church as the original mud building was not large enough for the congregation. They taught the natives how to make bricks and cement and how to build.

During the making of the bricks for this church an accident occurred which nearly resulted in the closing of the mission. On April 1st, 1931, some youths and girls were carrying bricks out of the kiln, singing and pushing one another as they worked. Suddenly the whole pile collapsed, burying three girls and two boys. Some women who were going for water gave the alarm and soon the compound was full of frantic natives all shouting agreement with the chief who said: 'You see what happens when you allow your children to work for the foreigners.' They ran shrieking when a Father or Sister managed to extricate one of the victims, but none of them would help to carry out the dying children. The three girls died immediately and one of the boys a week later. Papiti, the king, was soon on the spot and held a conference with his chiefs, all but two of whom were clamouring for the expulsion of the missionaries. The king listened to their speeches and then rose to speak himself. 'Is not this a thing permitted by God?' he asked. 'Did the foreigners do it deliberately? If a crocodile takes one of our young men, on whom do we take revenge? Is this not an accident, too? Have not the foreigners helped us often? Who take care of our sick? Is not this permitted by God?' The chiefs rose: 'You have spoken well,' they said, 'let us go.' The mission

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763 the snarling dogs. He and the catechist have not gone far on
* 797 their way towards Kodok, when the shrill wailing of women breaks out in the village they have just left; the man has died. The priest stops for a moment and commends the departed soul to God and then continues on his road.

* 797 In Kodok he meets with a disappointment. It is two p.m. and he had hoped to find his friend the Assistant District Commissioner at home, but he is out on trek in his district and so all hopes of a refreshing wash, followed by a still more refreshing bottle of cold beer and lunch, vanish. He stops for a while and rests in the shade outside the shop of one of the merchants, and is offered and gratefully accepts a glass of tepid, sickly sweet lemonade. At last, with a sigh, he throws away his cigarette and reluctantly pulls himself to his feet, to cover the ten miles that lie between him and a bath, a meal and a luxurious stretch in a deck chair.

Not all sick calls have the same happy ending as that just described. Sometimes the priest makes a long and tiring journey to find that the person he has come to see was suffering from an imaginary sickness, or else has made a miraculous recovery and has gone off to put in some work in his field, or for a day's fishing. Sometimes, alas! he arrives too late, and finds only a newly-made grave.

763 On one occasion I had been wandering through some
* 797 villages in the evening and made a last call, just at sunset, at
● [16A] Pabiu. Here by chance I found a youth, shrunken and wasted by tuberculosis and obviously ill beyond recovery. He had been sick, I was told, for the past six months and had recently been brought from a village inland where he had been living for the past several years, in order that he might die in his own village. He was not a Christian, but had been a pupil at the mission school some years previously, and he still remembered some of his catechism, and asked to be baptized. Since he was quite cheerful and lively in spite of his illness, there did not seem to be any immediate danger of death so I promised that I would return the following evening to instruct and baptize him. He assented cheerfully,

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763 confession was an easy task now, and I gave her Holy
*797 Viaticum and then proceeded to anoint her. As I did so she stirred feebly, tried to raise herself up and twisted her shoulder towards me. 'Father,' she said 'put some there. That's where the pain is.'

*797 Epidemics sometimes visit the district and then the
[731 missionary is very busy indeed. Devastating though they
●[164 may be, carrying off both young and old, the strong as well as the weak, they can have a chastening effect on the lazy, indifferent and careless. On one occasion I stood in the dark behind a hut, whilst mosquitoes in their thousands whined and buzzed and bit, hearing a panic-stricken man's confession. Within the hut, his wife, his little daughter and infant son, all newly baptized, lay dying. The sickness had not touched him, but its visitation to his home did what years of coaxing, prodding and reminding had failed to do.

164 A primitive people like the Shilluk fall an easy prey to
744 whatever sickness is going. Not overclean in their persons and insanitary in their habits, they huddle together at night in small windowless huts with the doorway blocked by a heavy grass mat; hence disease quickly spreads from person to person, from hut to hut and from village to village. Medical facilities are limited and an epidemic can get a good hold before effective reinforcements can be sent from Malakal, sixty miles away, to help the overworked Medical Assistant. During my first years at Detwok, cerebro-spinal meningitis was a regular annual visitor. It came when the rains ceased, and with the first showers of the next rainy season it disappeared again, but during the intervening months it did its deadly work and scarcely a day passed without some village mourning its dead. An effective remedy was found, however, in a spinal injection of the famous 'M & B' drug, and the scourge lost much of its terror. After 1942 it failed to put in its annual appearance, and to date Detwok and district has been free of it altogether, although yearly it makes its presence felt in the southern end of the province, and takes a deadly toll in other provinces in the Sudan.

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In September 1944 a new sickness swept through the country. One evening I received a sick call from a village some four miles to the south of Detwok. Just as I was setting out another message came in from a village equally distant from this mission, but to the north. It so chanced that I was alone in the mission at the time so that the two calls from opposite directions put me in something of a quandary, since the rains were on and I could not use a bicycle. However, the call from the south appeared to be the more urgent of the two, so I went there and sent a catechist north to do whatever he could. When I arrived at my destination, I was appalled at what I found. It was not one person who was ill, but a dozen or so, including three in the house to which I had been called. (It was on this occasion that after I had baptized his wife and children the terrified husband asked me to hear his confession on the spot.) I found the same in the other villages nearby, and when I met my catechist that night he had a similar tale to report from the north. I immediately sent a runner to Kodok to wire the news through to Malakal, surmising that the outbreak was one of cerebro-spinal meningitis, since the symptoms seemed to be similar, though I was puzzled at its appearance during the rains. Prompt help was forthcoming from Malakal. The following day a launch brought a doctor and a team of assistants, and the outbreak was diagnosed as relapsing fever. It is a disease carried by lice. The person infected becomes ill and is very seedy for about a week; then he recovers and apparently is as well as ever, but after a short interval he is stricken down again, and unless medical assistance is at hand, death generally follows. Fortunately, medical assistance was at hand, and although, owing to the sickness becoming widespread so rapidly, many succumbed to it, very many were saved thanks to the immediate action taken by the medical authorities.

The major problem was how to stamp out this plague which had originated somewhere round Kaka and advanced south with great rapidity. Squads of soldiers and public health workers were sent to the district and they toured the

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villages, boiling, disinfecting or burning anything that could harbour the deadly lice. It was a long struggle, and the sickness had spread south of Lul and managed to get a hold on the Malakal side of the river before it was finally destroyed.

In the mission, we fought long and unceasingly, and happily, not unsuccessfully, to keep the fever at bay. Naturally in the school we had always maintained a very high standard of cleanliness. A morning bath for the children had always been enforced, their clothes had to be washed every Saturday, and classrooms and dormitories were swept and dusted daily. But we multiplied our efforts; the pupils' heads were kept shaved, and their clothes, blankets and mosquito nets were boiled. They were deprived of all beads, bracelets and trinkets—anything indeed where lice could find refuge. Stripped of their adornments for the first time, they appeared to be really naked, and they, and we, lived in a perpetual cloud of D.D.T. powder. As far as possible the villages were put out of bounds and the children's activities confined to the area between the mission and the river. Thanks to all these precautions only two boys went down with the sickness. These were promptly and rigorously isolated and, receiving immediate medical attention, both recovered.

Since the passing of the relapsing fever epidemic the district has been free from any serious outbreak of sickness. Every year, however, from November to March, when the really cold North wind comes howling across the country, many people, particularly among the old folk, get pneumonia, and the priest is ever on the alert for the knock on his door and the summons which may take him but ten minutes to answer, or on the other hand may mean a journey of twenty miles or more, and occupy him the best part of the day.